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AUTHOR Gordon, Edmund W.
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ABSTRACT

Dr. Edmund Gordon explains student revolt as a justified political movement and not symptomatic of personal problems or the generation gap. Students, an oppressed class systematically kept out of the labor force by military obligations and higher education, have legitimate complaints against the universities whose interests have become intertwined with those of business and government. The trustees, on the other hand, are confronted with their fiscal and managerial responsibilities to conserve and maintain what is, and their pedagogical responsibilities for insuring that these institutions continue to evolve as agencies responsive to the needs of students and of society. (KG)

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Edmund W. Gordon
Teachers College
Columbia University

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RELEVANCE OR REVOLT

I have been asked to speak this morning on a subject which concerns us all, as educators, as citizens, and as parents. The topic, "Relevance or Revolt," indicates the existence of a dichotomous situation in which one alternative--relevance--may reduce the chance for revolt and, conversely, the failure to achieve relevance, may enhance the chance for protest or rebellion. In the present period the ascendency of revolt may be an indicator of the low degree of relevance reflected in the major instruments of the social order. I hope that in the course of my talk this morning I will be able to redefine the terms and thus the problem so that we can move away from some of the stereotyped and simplistic thinking which has precluded movement in the direction of new social forms and instruments more appropriate to contemporary need.

It was common last year at the time of the Columbia disturbances for many of the senior members of the faculty to speak of the crisis as a cultural one and to refer loosely to the "communication gap" between students on the one hand and faculty and administration on the other. This viewpoint was expressed, among others by Lionel Trilling, who stated: "...the explicit issues were largely fictitious.... The most radical students were expressing their doctrinal alienation from and disgust with the whole of American culture. The less radical but still militant students were attempting to reach a new definition of what a young person is in relation to the institutions he is involved with." [1]

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Professor Trilling's view is essentially consistent with that of the mass media, who have seized on the slogan "generation gap" as if it alone could magically explain the revolt of young people everywhere. By exhibiting the colorful trappings of youth culture--hair, costumes, posters--the media seems to imply that the struggle is a cultural one, a violent disagreement on matters of taste. Behind the phrase "generation gap" lies the comforting thought that the problem is somehow no one's responsibility, a comic-tragic function of the age-old inability of fathers and sons to speak the same language.

Closely related to the cultural gap concept is the psychological interpretation of the conflict. This view traces student unrest to the personality problems of individual demonstrators: they are said to be acting out their unconscious conflicts. Child-rearing practices of the late 1940's and early '50's are said to have caused the present situation. A common interpretation is that the students of this generation have had it "too good," are "spoiled," have never learned respect for authority, are by their misbehavior demanding discipline and structure.

Neither the cultural or the psychological apologies put forward can adequately explain the general state of revolt we see among students, among blacks, among the dispossessed. These rebellions are caused by contradictions in the social and economic structure and the system of values which are dominant in the United States society. Not unlike the other struggles, the student movement is first and foremost a political

movement, whose object is to change the present national governmental establishment which they consider to be a corporate-dominated imperialist power. Its immediate objectives are to resist the war machine, to counter the racist policies which permeate the society, to reverse the dehumanizing impact of poverty and caste status, and to begin to build a mass base for political action through alliances with other insurgent groups. Though the politics of the students are sometimes naive and ahistorical, and their actions inconsistent, they and a growing segment of poor people and people of color have been left to fill a void in the national political scene--to articulate a position committed to radical social and economic change.

How did the students, so docile and withdrawn in the 1950's, come to play this new role? An appropriate analysis has been offered by John and Margaret Rowntree in their article, "Youth as Class: The Political Economy of Youth." [2] The Rowntrees argue that youth constitute an exploited class in our society--perhaps not the most exploited segment, but certainly the largest. Moreover, young people are beginning to develop class consciousness and a solidarity which goes far beyond youth culture. The American economy, as the Rowntrees point out, has made its most dramatic gains since 1940 in the areas of defense and education. Both these sectors absorb the nation's surplus manpower, which happens mainly to be youth, while keeping them out of the labor market. Young people are today faced with three options: the military draft, further schooling, and unemployment or inferior employment. Between 1960 and 1965, the defense-education complex alone absorbed two-thirds of the

total increase in the 18-24-year-old potential entrants to the labor force.[3] At the same time, those who dropped out of school in order to find a job were faced with an unemployment rate three times higher than those 25 and over. For black youth the unemployment rate runs as high as 35%.

Those young people who enter the military receive very low wages compared to civilian pay. For many, their service constitutes a condition of forced labor under circumstances of the highest risk. As for the students--the assumed lucky ones--many stay in school involuntarily and are exposed to educational experiences which have not the slightest interest for them. As coercedly absorbed surplus manpower, they labor but produce no tangible product; they are paid little for their labor, and must forego several years' economic and political independence. Although this sacrifice is considered an investment for the dividends they may reap later, many students have claimed that they are being trained for unproductive, meaningless jobs. When they graduate, furthermore, they often find that a bachelor's degree is no guarantee to a satisfying position or meaningful role in the society.

Recently, Ivar Berg has noted the stepped-up requirements for high school graduation, for college credentials, and for professional training, and has demonstrated that in a number of occupations the raised requirements do not lead to greater worker productivity; in fact, less educated workers often performed more competently and were more dependable employees than their more educated colleagues.[4]

Although it has often been demonstrated that apprenticeships are a much more effective means of acquiring certain skills, colleges are increasingly being used for the technical training of future workers. This is particularly true of the junior colleges which, in the absence of a viable apprenticeship system, have come to combine within the college program courses ranging from the traditionally academic to those designed to prepare students for a wide variety of vocational and technical positions.

The baccalaureate degree, on the other hand, is increasingly becoming a credential necessary for entry into the white collar labor force, with little concern given to the relationship between the requirements of work in these areas and the training which takes place in the university.

Those of us who are committed to the liberating impact of the arts and sciences find ourselves increasingly a part of a coercive force which uses the processes of formal study for political-economic purposes. Indications are that there is no ceiling on the potential growth of academia, whether useful or not, and on its ability to absorb a limitless amount of surplus manpower which our private sector is unable or unwilling to use.

II. The Situation in the Universities

Our society's need to keep a large segment of its working-age population out of the labor force has led to a tradition of college attendance, which has flooded institutions of higher learning with privileged youth and a growing number of poor and minority youth. What do these students find there? The alienating experience of attending a modern university has been described and analyzed by such observers as Margaret Mead, Edgar Friedenberg, Paul Goodman, and Ernest Becker. I do not pretend to offer anything here that has not already been stated. Too often the student feels and is actually treated like a machine part being processed for mass assembly. Little interest is taken in his special educational needs or personal feelings. The courses may offer little of the knowledge the student feels he wants to acquire, and often the students' information pool and value orientation render the curriculum obsolete. Each new semester he must comply with a recalcitrant system of credit hours, course requirements, examinations, and other procedures his professors deem necessary. His worth as an academic being, or for that matter, as a human being, is determined by the grade he is given, and his work is usually graded according to the sacred bell curve, which tends to ensure that if he does well his colleagues will not and vice versa. If his work is not rated highly enough, the student may find his grades reported to the draft board and himself forced into a military career. Despite the threat of this competition to peer solidarity, most students have come to rely more and more on the informal education which they receive outside the classroom from their

friends, from independent study, and from life experiences.

Should the student want to change the conditions within the university, he finds in most places that he has no authority whatsoever. The student is typically treated as a transient member of a community of scholars whose opinions are hardly worth taking into consideration alongside those of the faculty and administration. Often there are not even channels to receive his complaints. As William Birenbaum has noted, "Student lawlessness and disorder on the campuses is a direct function of the authoritarian and oligarchical order imposed by those who possess the law-making power in the university. Those who cry out most loudly now against the politicalization of the university are really making a last-ditch defense of the present political rigging of academic privilege and vested interest." 5

One might ask, "How can we even speak of a community of scholars when 90% of its members have no say whatsoever in the running of that community?"

Under these conditions, the designation "student" becomes the society's excuse of depriving a person of his right to make decisions in matters which concern him. It is only in a few societies like ours that the 18-year-old is treated as a non-adult and everything possible is done to delay recognition of his maturity. With the extension of schooling on a mass scale to include students in their mid and late 20's, the school's role of <u>in loco parentis</u> becomes increasingly inappropriate. Mead and

Friedenberg, among others, have pointed out the disastrous effects of this substitute parent role in which the educational institution attempts to regulate every aspect of a student's waking and sleeping hours, from what he wears to under what circumstances he can make love.

For many years, students have objected more quietly to their life conditions during the public school and university years. It was only when an increased political awareness of the behavior of educational institutions in relation to other sectors of society became widespread, that student groups began to agitate more openly for immediate change. Most repugnant to students was the role of their schools in the War on Vietnam. Universities receive a substantial share of their monies from the Federal Government, and the Department of Defense has for the last decade been one of the biggest investors in higher education. In return for its investments, the Defense Department has been able to gather from the halls of ivy information on anything from the production of poison gases to the belief structure of revolutionary guerrillas in South America. (It is thought to be a common occurrence for anthropologists, for example, on their return from the field to be approached by CIA officials for information. That department is <u>not</u> well known for its interest in the scholarly pursuit of anthropology.) Classified and secret research are allowed to appropriate badly needed university facilities and those working on many of these projects must obtain security clearances. This is very serious business. Not only does it discourage unpopular criticism and dissent, it also threatens to erode the independence of academic disciplines and to destroy the spirit of free and open inquiry, all of which are essential

to the functioning of a true university. The presence of the military in the form of ROTC units and privileged recruiting for military purposes also seem to be inappropriate in academic surroundings. The problem is exacerbated by the fact that our government is engaged in the most unpopular, immoral, and indefensible war that the United States has ever fought. Opposition to the War on Vietnam is strongest among students who, obviously, have the most to lose by our military involvement.

In addition to this military involvement, in recent years a number of disclosures have shaken the faith of students and educators in the cloistered freedom of universities. The CIA's infiltration of the National Student Association, the Project Camelot Scandal, the recent allegations that the National Science Foundation is under political control--these disclosures have created a credibility gap between university administrators and students. More and more students have begun to assume moral responsibility for the activities that occur on the campus and to express their concern for much that happens in the broader community.

Any moral superiority that institutions of higher learning might have claimed has been further discredited by the profit-making schemes and union-busting activities which have become a part of the fiscal management of the universities. James Ridgeway, in his book The Closed Corporation, has carefully documented the number of products which universities are selling in addition to education--they range from insecticides, to cigarette filters, to land speculation. Ridgeway often found a close connection between the business enterprises of the trustee board members

and those of the university. Many university Boards of Trustees are composed of bankers, realtors, heads of mass media, and other corporation heads. Increasingly, students see them there not just to raise donations for the universities, but also to ensure that their investments and interests are protected in this number one growth industry in the country. Trustees were originally instituted to function as watchdogs, making sure that the university represented the interests of the society at large, but the almost universal absence of poor or working class people and minority group representatives from these boards has led to the situation where universities are out of touch with the mass of people and serve the interests of a privileged few.

It would be a mistake, however, to blame the administration and trustees exclusively for using the universities to further their own ends. While not so often attacked by students, senior faculty are often just as guilty. Ridgeway points out that many professors find it hard to resist any research or consultant fee that comes along, and the more entrepreneurial faculty members organize their own corporations. Whether flying off to Washington to advise a federal agency or to raise additional research funds, the most enterprising of these educators have little time for classes and student consultations. Of course, as many others have noted, the present funding structure and career ladder models encourage such entrepreneurism: grants must be renewed periodically, tenure and promotion are largely dependent upon publication, research, and professional visibility. In far too few institutions is teaching given highest priority in the allocation of rewards.

I should mention two volatile areas which have provoked rebellion on many campuses. First, physical expansion is an understandable need for universities, but it can lead to excessive hardships when schools like Chicago, Columbia, or Harvard, located in crowded cities, evict many low-income residents without making the necessary relocation, compensation, or provisions for replacement housing. In repeated instances, the needs of the university to expand its physical plant have run rough shod over the needs of their surrounding neighbors for more adequate housing and community facilities. T.C. Columbia is unique in its building plan, which carries a guarantee to provide in its new structures residential housing for all persons currently living on the site. In the absence of this kind of planning, students see the university as an inhuman community-destroying force from which they must disassociate or against which they must resist.

Second is the long history of exclusion from the university student body of people who are poor and of people of color. The recent struggles for more egalitarian admissions practices and open admission have been aimed at bringing some measure of democratic practice to this area. Obviously, there are problems in making drastic changes in the composition of collegiate populations. A policy of open admissions, i.e., admitting people from the immediate community who apply, would result in pressure on the university to expand more rapidly than is healthy or possible. It would require the university to provide large amounts of financial aid. It would, in most instances, require the correction of conscious or unconscious racial bias. In all instances, it should result

in significant changes in the curriculum and social climate. However, a few institutions have come to accept open admissions as inevitable within the next two or three years. Rutgers University has already announced such a policy for this coming fall. Practically, all of our institutions of higher education have begun to do something about the admission of more students from low income and minority groups. This will certainly bring changes in the content and character of American higher education.

III. Student Revolts

The dynamics and nature of student revolt deserve attention. Like the rest of our society, the student rebellion movements are divided by race. There is a black student movement and a white student movement. The current white student movement had its inception at Berkeley several years ago. Led on most campuses by the Students for a Democratic Society, the movement has been directed at instituting radical political, economic, and social change, both in and outside the University. In fact, a number of SDS chapters have paid relatively little attention to university restructure on the assumption that, without massive change in the society at large, such attempts to alter the university would be meaningless. Thus, the major foci of radical campus movements have been against the War on Vietnam, the draft system, and ROTC, with an increasing emphasis on the effects of racism on our society. The idea of communal resistance, as exemplified by sit-ins and the occupation of buildings, demonstrates their desire to actualize the potential of student power. Although recognizably weaker, students see themselves in a position comparable to that of organized labor and use similar tactics, such as strikes, to push for their demands. The emphasis on <u>resistance</u> by students was well expressed almost five years ago by Mario Savio at the final sit-in at Berkeley; Savio said:

> This is a time when the operations of the machine become so odious, make you so sick at heart, that you can't take part, you can't even tacitly take part. And you've got to put your bodies upon the

> gears and upon the wheels, upon the levers, upon all the apparatus, and you've got to make it stop. And you've got to indicate to the people who run it, to the people who own it, that unless you're free, the machine will be prevented from working at all.

Since the Berkeley days, the growing awareness by students of their power, or the lack of it, has been accompanied by an identification with the struggle of black people. An important student publication last year was entitled "The Student as Nigger." Although students generally recognize their status as higher than that of minorities, and particularly black people, students see important parallels between their plight and status and that of blacks in this country. As a result, the two movements have begun to make tentative alliances. White student activists have seen the need to strip the university of its elitist character and make the university open to youth of all economic classes, be they black, brown, or white. It is not simply a question of idealism; the white students hope that their own education, which too often seems sterile, will be enriched and made more relevant by the presence of other minority groups. The most active students do not stop at the university, but lend support to such groups as the welfare rights movement, community groups attempting to stop urban renewal, (politically dubbed urban <u>black</u> removal), and neighborhoods fighting to establish community control of their schools and hospitals. The most radical of the white student movements are less identified with specific causes and programs and more oriented toward disruption and de-

struction of the existing order. Like classic anarchists they need no program to replace what is, they are committed to the idea that something better must come from the destruction of the evil which exists.

As opposed to the white student movement, the black students have only recently begun to organize on white university campuses. This is largely because until a year or two ago there were not enough Afro-American students on any one campus to generate a movement. The black resistance movement on Negro college campuses predates the rebirth of the white movements. Black students reintroduced student protest immediately following the Joe McCarthy period.

The dynamics behind the black student movement are easily understood. In most universities, black and other minority group students have recently been admitted in token numbers and have been spread throughout the campuses--often one per dormitory--so that their already scarce numbers have been further diluted. These students have been accustomed to living in a largely black world, though often not through their own choice. This new separation from others of their own color can be a terrifying, demanding, and extraordinarily lonely experience. The feelings of powerlessness experienced by all university students are exaccerbated among these black students. They often see themselves as token integrators in every situation carrying the burdens of cultural representatives and translators to an enthusiastic but not too understanding audience. Thus, black as well as other minority group students are pressed to unite with others of their own group. Integration is regarded as a goal not taken seriously by others at these

white institutions and achieved at too high a cost by the black students. At the same time, these young blacks identify with stronger forces in the black community which are advocating separation and promoting black nationalism.

The attempt by blacks to achieve some measure of self-determination is in part a function of the revitalization of the Afro-American nationalist movement in this country. It is also a manifestation of the Third World movement on the international scene. Though hidden by most standard texts on American history, the struggle for Afro-American cultural and national identity has a long history in this country. Such black leaders as Delaney and Douglas in the 1800's, Marcus Garvey after World War I, and DuBois for the greater part of this century, have been among the more prominent proponents for such a movement.

Delaney and Garvey were strong advocates of Afro-American nationalism with clear separatist goals. Both of these men argued for the creation of Negro Nations in America or in Africa. Garvey actually formed several black cooperatives and business groups--the largest being the Colored Merchants Association. He probably had the largest mass following of any black leader the United States has produced, but his followers were more sympathetic to an American black nationalism than to his back-to-Africa movement.

Douglas and DuBois, on the other hand, were integrationists. Both had strong nationalistic sentiments and took great pride in their blackness.

Both were strong advocates of black ethnic group development and integrity, but they saw the best medium for that development and expression to be in the context of the broader society of the United States of America. Neither Delaney, Garvey, nor Douglas, however, conceived of the problems of black people as being related to fundamental changes in the political economy of the United States. DuBois, on the other hand, in his latter years came to see the solution of the problems of black people and those of all oppressed peoples as being related to the capitalist and economic imperialist commitments of this country. In the last twenty years of his life he was a socialist and during the last three or four years of his life he embraced communism, convinced that a planned collectivist economy could better serve our nation and black people than could capitalism. DuBois was acknowledged as the foremost intellectual black America has produced. He was highly respected by the black community, but no mass movement developed around him. Although his ideas influenced and probably determined the course of the Civil Rights Movement for most of this century, blacks in the United States have generally rejected his position that capitalism at home and economic empirialism abroad are the chief enemy. The black movement on and off campus has generally aimed at enabling black people to receive a bigger share of the pie. It has sought to be a part of what is generally seen as a good thing.

On the other hand, Martin Luther King and Malcolm X, just before each was killed, had begun to sense the importance of the DuBois message. Both of these murdered leaders had begun to talk about the relationship between the plight of black people, economic exploitation of colored people at home

and abroad, and the increasing domination of our society by the military-industrial complex. More recently, such leaders as Rap Brown and Eldridge Cleaver have advocated the necessity for radical economic and political change.

A significant minority of black students have followed these leaders in advocating radical political and economic change as the only solution to the problems of black people.

However, in general, the black student movement in the United States--for better or worse--has emphasized more national-cultural concerns than radical economic and political ones. The demands of the Afro-American Students Association have been limited largely to seeking reform within the university structure. However, within this microcosm, their goals are often more concrete and realistic than those of the more radical white students. Black student determination of admissions procedures, black curricula, and tenure for black professors, for example, can be readily met without overturning the structure of the university.

These are not nation-shaking matters and alongside the concerns of more radical students they may even seem anemic. They are, nonetheless, important. White America seems unaware of the frustration, resentment, and anger that resides in black people today. What seems like rapid progress in civil rights over the past few years has only served to make the black community more aware of the difference between what is and what could be. The desperation and fear which led black students at Cornell University to equip them-

selves with guns and rifles during their recent building occupation is tragic. If we cannot respond to the simplistic demands of black students to be included in on a piece of the action, what can we expect to do for that larger and more radical group which threatens to attack the whole establishment?

The time for hand-ringing and study groups and evasive answers and pompous protocol has passed. We are faced with a crisis that mounts day by day. Just as black militants have reached the point where riots and burnings are their means of getting the society's attention, students are using the sit-in, the lock-out, the take-over, the occupation to get the attention of educational leaders. They say to us that nobody is willing to listen, much less do anything, about their plight. Is there any wonder that they have begun to take more aggressive action? The passive alienation of so many of these young people should have been enough to let us know that something is wrong. The increasing dissent of some of our most able young people should have moved us to act. But our action so far has largely been to repress. It is a national shame that our most prestigious universities have become battlegrounds for club-swinging policemen. We approach a state of intellectual and moral bankruptcy when the institutions charged with leading the nation in rational behavior begin to be centers of irrational conflict and repression. If institutions of higher learning cannot be responsive to the concerns of the students they are charged with teaching, and students are forced to express their concerns through acts of desparation, the university forfeits its right to exist as an institution of higher education. Rather it becomes an institution of higher <u>coercion</u>.

Administrative unresponsiveness to student concerns and intolerance of sit-ins and other forms of demonstration indicate an unwillingness to regard students as legitimate petitioners. As compared to unions, students have not yet won the right to take collective action, nor do they have the power of unions to absorb penalties from the courts. It would seem, though, that as students become a larger segment of our population, collective action is not only inevitable, but is probably the only means of forcing sufficient changes in the educational institutions of our country so that they can meet these student needs. Certainly, even in the last year, student representation on faculty and administrative committees has usually come as the result of collective action on the part of these students. Fortunately, in recent weeks we have seen a shift away from police action. However, if the court injunction is a more pacific response to protest than is the policeman's club, it is also a greater repressive measure and neither is an appropriate response.

Actually, our resort to police violence at home in our efforts at dealing with urban and campus revolts is not unlike our nationally sponsored violence in Vietnam. This similarity in our militaristic response to rebellion at home and abroad is one of the central points at issue. It is not that the content of higher education has suddenly become irrelevant, even though many of our students claim this. Information mastery, management of knowledge, information analysis, cultural and intellectual competence are probably more important to all segments of our population now than ever before. It is the purposes to which knowledge and the pursuit of knowledge are committed that lack relevance for the central issues of our

time. It is out of the contradiction born of this misfit that our domestic and international problems stem. Intellectual effort is not being concentrated on problems related to the equitable distribution of goods, services and resources among the peoples of the world (or even among the people in this country). Our institutions and intellectual leaders are not devoting their research and intellective energies to problems related to the distribution of power through the democratic participation of all people or even all of our own citizens. Despite the enormous growth in facilities and resources available to higher education, the leadership of these institutions does not spend sleepless nights in concern over the distribution of knowledge to all segments of the population or in concern over the use of knowledge for the betterment of human societies. It is in these matters that the university duplicates the irrelevance and the immorality of the larger society. It is from these sins of ommission that the university shares in the revolt that is present in and appropriate to such an infirm society.

It may be that the administrators and trustees of these institutions are confronted with irresolvable role conflicts. The trustees of the institution are charged with conserving the institution's resources and maintaining its existance. The role of students in these institutions is to become educated, yet, it is the primary purpose of education and knowledge not to conserve but to unsettle, to ferment discord, to stir up conflict in the mind as an essential precursor to growth and new knowledge. Education serves its highest function when it does not simply transmit the best of the past, but facilitates movement from the best that we know to the best

that is possible given man's present state of development. It is the purpose of education to till the soil of the existing social order and to plant the seeds from which new forms, new social orders grow. When the soil is recalcitrant and unyielding--resistant to the natural forces for change--more radical processes emerge. The trustees of the university are thus confronted with their fiscal and managerial responsibilities to conserve and maintain what is, and their pedagogical responsibilities for insuring that the institutions continue to evolve as new agencies serving the highest order of societal needs. Maybe they cannot play both those roles. Maybe that is why we have faculty members to whom we supposedly insure academic freedom. It may be that in this society the trustee must conserve and the faculty must educate, even though the process of education is counter-conservative.

We are in the midst of a technological and social revolution to which education has contributed mightily. The institutional forms through which this contribution was made may no longer be appropriate and their purposes and commitments may be in many ways counter-revolutionary--they are defeating of new and more relevant goals and commitments. The tasks of the trustee in this period may still be that of conservation, but conservation without retarding the processes of change. It is the task of the teacher to educate--to educate for change--to educate through change. To educate for orderly planned revolution. If necessary, to educate through more disruptive revolutionary action.

I am not at all optimistic that our institutions will be able to quickly play a more appropriate role, since the representatives of the status quo have seldom, if ever, been able to preside over revolutionary processes. If our educational institutions cannot move to accommodate and facilitate wide degrees of change in education as well as in the society at large, more disruptive, rebellious, and revolutionary movements are likely to be our fate, for relevance today means, in part, a sensitivity to our irrelevance and a readiness to accept a new set of priorities which will truly honor the humanitarian values to which we have always claimed to adhere. I say I am not optimistic because I do not see people in high places nor large numbers of significant people in low places who are prepared for open inquiry into the contradictions of our society and the changes which may be necessary. We still seem more committed to conservation of privilege, to law and order. My young anarchist friends may be right. It is the purpose of revolutions to destroy the old forms which cannot change so that new forms may arise in their places. Such destruction may be necessary even though they may not be able to specify in advance exactly what the new forms will be.